Designing the Coaching and Mentoring Strategy in Romania under the Pressure of the Pandemic Caused by SARS-Cov2 Virus

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Abstract

This paper wants to be the starting point for designing a coaching and mentoring strategy applicable in Romania, strategy whose implementation can reduce de effects of the human resources crisis. The work data were collected through a questionnaire. Using QCA analysis, the opinions of coaching and mentoring service providers were analyzed to adapt the strategy to the needs of the market, a constantly changing market, especially in terms of the pandemic aspect caused by the SARS-Cov2 virus.

Key words: coaching, mentoring, strategies, workforce, human resources
J.E.L. classification: J21, J23, J24, M12, M53

1. Introduction

This paper is intended as a continuation of the research in the aforementioned field, starting, first of all, from the paper "Human Resources Shortage – Decisive Factor in Substantiating the Personnel Attraction Strategy" (Micu, 2019), where we found that the organizations performing vehicle repair and maintenance activities (tailored for Galați City) are facing labor shortage due to various causes. We have identified and analyzed the causes and proposed general redress solutions, and, in this paper, we aim at achieving a wider study to this effect, starting with the identification of the situation generated by the national crisis, particularly due to the SARS-Cov2 virus, then highlight the extent to which certain tactics, which are part of a coaching and mentoring strategies, may decisively contribute to reducing the identified human resources shortage.

2. Theoretical background

According to a Eurostat study done in 2016, Romania was considered to be the second most competitive labor market in what concerns the costs, Bulgaria coming in first. Domestically, foreign investors could recruit employees as qualified as those in the developed countries, but at a low cost of only 5 Euro per hour. (Eurostat)

Romania's competitive argument over the last years – low labor cost, ceased to be topical. The talent part became another criterion analyzed at the recruiting moment. The university studies graduates possess a consistent baggage of theoretical knowledge, but when they get employed, the employer's need for training investments is obvious. (Profit.ro, 2016)

Compared with the last 10 years, 2017 was considered to be the best for the human resources market, given the fact that the recruitment level grew by approximately 40%, and the shortage was felt in all the fields according to the data presented by Adecco Romania. (Profit.ro, 2017) According to theSmartree Workforce Index, still in the year 2017, the number of employments grew by approximately 12%. At the same time, there was a 11% growth in the bonuses awarded in the private sector. According to the analyzed data, there were employments in all the activity fields, mainly in

telecommunications, financial services, audit and consultancy, pharma, production of car parts, BPO services, software development, digital services and IT consultancy. (Smartree)

In 2018, the Romanian Government took the measure to double the number of non-EU foreign workers. As an immediate result, the Romanian organizations, having access to a new recruitment market, started hiring more and more workers coming from exotic countries, such as Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal etc. Limits were modified to 8,000 permanent workers and 2,400 temporary workers. (Dinca, 2018)

Relating to the hotelier field in Romania, we may say that the year 2018 witnessed the most severe human resources crisis of the past 28 years. In the beginning of the summer season, 99% of the hotel owners were facing a human resources shortage in excess of 50%. (Iancu, 2018)

The questionnaire issued by the Foreign Investors' Council (FIC) in the year 2018, which was broadcast in its own network, illustrated an entirely new aspect – Romania was no longer competitive in regard to the availability of the qualified workforce. (Profit.ro, 2018a)

In the year 2018, a series of organizations face the human resources market difficulties and the negative impact of the staff volatility on the business. At the same time, profits dwindle due to the increase in the workforce costs. The negative aspects referring to the workforce market are more frequently mentioned. One of them is the low training level of the higher and secondary education graduates. Secondly, personnel volatility triggered by the Romanians' access to the EU workforce market is invoked. A third aspect refers to the higher costs due to the new laws or the successive increases in the minimum salaries. (Panaite, 2018)

Further to research, we identified the Benefitonline.ro platform, which represents an innovative idea on the Romanian market as to the motivation of the companies' employees. The system, imported from more developed countries, is intended to be an alternative to the classical meal vouchers awarded to the employees, medical services subscriptions or others. The concept is simple: the organizations with 50-2000 employees enrol on the platform and allot a budget for benefits ranging between 150 lei and 700 lei monthly. Partners from various fields to which employees have access within the limits of the established budget operate on the platform. The main advantage is the flexibility due to the fact that the benefits are from various categories of interest: health, private pensions, tourism, transport etc. At present, 2883 providers are registered, who offer 3906 types of benefits. (Benefit Online)

The pandemic has changed the way in which young human resources relate to career – they get employed earlier and at the same time have realistic salary expectations. Therewith, they seek promising fields. The crisis that was also felt on the workforce market over the past moths had marked implications on the way the young relate to the professional life, even those who experience their first job. The last half a year triggered an attitude change with immediate visible effects, in the sense that the candidates with ages ranging between 18 and 24 years applied to a smaller extent than those from the 25-35 years and 36-45 years categories. Sales and IT are the fields that attract the young the most according to the results of the latest survey. This trend arises from the fact that the jobs in this field are assimilated to above-average revenues. Another factor significantly contributing to this trend is that the long-term professional development perspectives are more numerous. The customer relations/call center field, followed on a par with the marketing, human resources and accounting are also fields that attract the young. (Profit.ro, 2020a)

Further to a study conducted within the context of the pandemic among the representatives of the human resources departments, it followed that the most sought for human resources will be those having IT competences. Other categories who will easily find a workplace are those working in: e-commerce and digital, retail, automation and medicine. From a different perspective, those working in the confections and textiles industry or in real estate, will have to either wait longer than usual until finding another job, or they have to participate in professional reconversion programs. 80% of the respondents believe that the number of companies offering their own employees the facility to work from home as well will be growing. Another category, amounting to 38%, consider that another significant change that will occur on the labor market will be related to the companies' behavior. They will have the tendency to call for freelancers or specialists with whom they will work on temporary projects. (Profit.ro, 2020b)

The concept of remote work suffered notable changes given the new economic and social context. Thus, the reporting of employees and employers in this process has changed as well. The number of available remote (from home) jobs witnessed an ascending trend. It tripled since March 2020, compared with the same period of the previous year. Similarly, the search for candidates to fill in such positions increased. Applicants became aware of the fact that the employers have become more open until now to such a system. "Within the European Union, Romania is still the country with the lowest remote work percentage. Yet, things seem to change, even if this change was somewhat forced and determined by the new dynamics on the labor market. Yes, remote work and employment is a protection method and a measure to reduce as much as possible the risks of contacting or spreading the virus. But, where proof can be made that this kind of work has no negative impact on the business, on the long term, we will most likely see more remote jobs on the market and more employees working from "home", says Bogdan Badea, CEO eJobs Romania. It was found that not only companies manifest a growing interest in this direction, but candidates as well. Since the beginning of March 2020, the searches for the jobs involving the work from home grew by more than 400%. Secondly, part-time jobs were the most sought for. They grew by 151% compared with the previous year March. To a large extent, the nurse and human resources specialist jobs were searched by applicants. In both cases, there was an evolution of approximately +80% compared with the same period of 2019. (Profit.ro, 2020c)

Stefano Scabbio, president of Mediterraneanand Eastern Europefrom Manpower Group asserted that 65% of the primary school children will have a currently unknown job. The new workplaces will focus on depth skills (leadership, communication, creativity etc.) and less on what is defined as hard skills. The work process will also undergo modifications. Its tendency will be on horizontal – collaboration and not on the vertical - hierarchical. (Petcana, 2016)

3. Research methodology

During the data collection research, a 3-section questionnaire was used, which were addressed to a target sample of respondents: beneficiaries of coaching and mentoring services, providers of coaching and mentoring services and creators/designers of coaching and mentoring strategies. This method was employed because the questionnaire was broadcast in the online medium by Romanian organizations whose activity object is coaching and mentoring, in which people from the aforementioned categories work. The survey was designed in Google Forms.

The collected data was analyzed by using the fsQCA software, a solution that eliminates the gaps between the quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative benchmarking is a new technique that uses the Boolean algebra principles. By this method, data combinations can be achieved, which can be compared with one another and then can be logically simplified by an ascendent pair-comparison process. (fuzzy set/ Qualitative Comparative Analysis)

4. Findings

From the collected data, only the data that emphasizes the extent to which certain elements may influence the quality of the coaching or mentoring act were extracted, so as to obtain a high efficiency. 252 people responded to the questionnaire. The respondents had the possibility to answer all the sets of questions, with the possibility to be included in more categories of answers. Thus, we obtained 385 data sets divided as follows: 161 from beneficiaries, 161 from providers, 63 from creators/designers. In this case we will direct the attention to the category of coaching and mentoring services providers.

A Likert scale was used in the data collection process, then the results were calibrated by correlating the values from the fuzzy array from 0 to 1, thus complying with the QCA methodology. Table 1 illustrates the Likert scale calibration.

Table no. 1. Scale calibration

Fuzzy array value	Likert scale correspondent
1	Total agreement
0.75	Agreement
0.5	Neither agreement nor disagreement
0.25	Disagreement
0	Total disagreement

Source: Table designed by the authors

In this case we will work with 5 causal factors and 1 output variable. We have included among the causal factors:

- Reg – the need to regulate the profession of coach or mentor;
- Aut – authorization, namely establishing coaches and mentors as a body of experts;
- Edu – coaches' and mentors' education level;
- Cert – coaches' and mentors' certification level;
- Aso – affiliation of coaches and mentors to profile organizations;
- Perf –global influence of the aforementioned factors on performance;
- Rez – variable pointing out the calculation result of the fuzzy arrays' values on the previous causes by the relationshipRez = fuzzyand (Reg, Auto, Edu, Cert, Aso). It must be specified that through that function the minimum of the causal variables is calculated.

Further to the calibration of the collected results with the fuzzy array values, a table was obtained for centralization.

In a first stage, we decided to highlight the influence of the previous condition Rez on the Perf output. Thus, we decided to apply function XY PLOT which resulted into Figure 1.

Analyzing the obtained data, we may notice that the consistency score ($X<=Y$) is 0.98, which means that the variable identified with the causal condition (Rez – cumulation of all causal conditions) may result into the 98% fulfilment of the desired result (identified by Perf output). The coverage score (consistency for $X>=Y$) is 0.75, which amounts to the fact that among the questionnaire respondents there is a 75% consensus as to the result's fulfilment. Thys, it may be concluded that the strategy's success is guaranteed if emphasis is placed in parallel on the implementation of all the measures identified by the analyzed variables.

Figure no. 1. Causality distribution between variable Rez and the Perf result in the XY plan graph
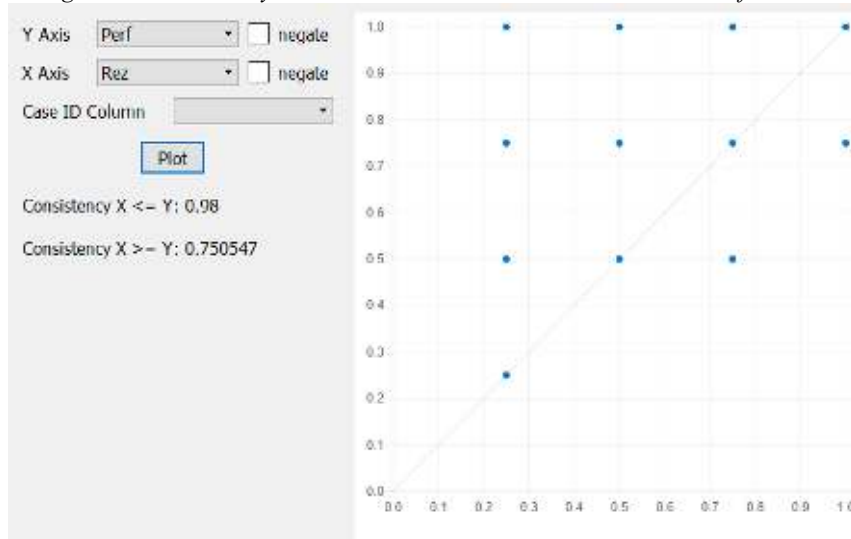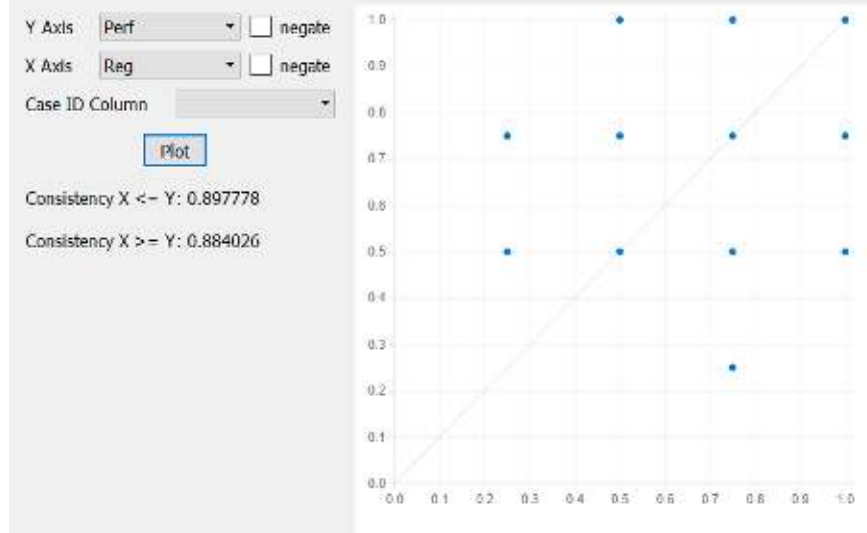

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software.

Because we wish to establish an impact hierarchy of the proposed development directions on the result intended to be obtained, we continued with the individual testing of each measure in order to establish the extent to which it may lead to the goal's fulfilment. We will further use the same analysis to achieve consensus in the end.

In Figure 2 we tested the measure to which the causal condition Reg influences Perf result. In this case, we notice a 0.89 consistency score, which amounts to the fact that the goal is 89% fulfilled. In this case, there is an 88% consensus among the respondents, which is highlighted by the 0.88 coverage score. We consider that emphasis should be placed on the measure in question while designing the strategy.
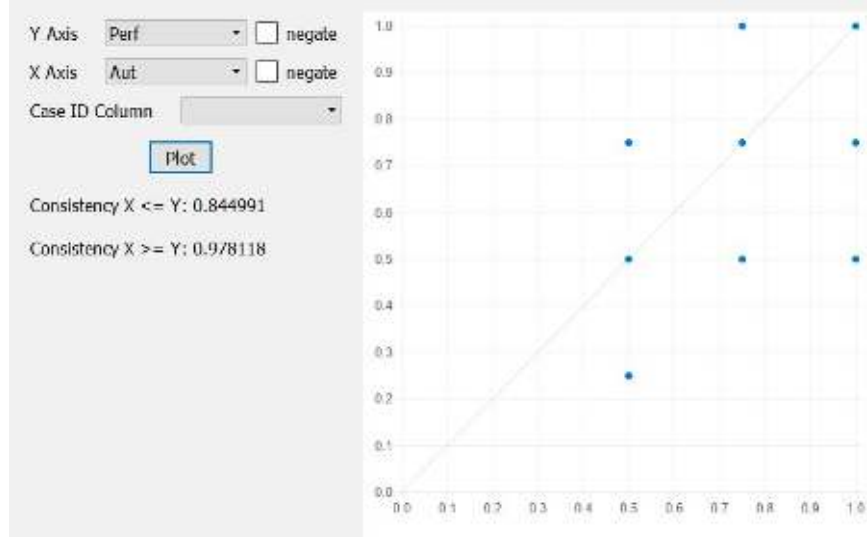
Figure no. 2. Causality distribution between variable Reg and the Perf result in the XY plan graph

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software.

In Figure 3 the measure in which variable Aut produces the desired Perf result is tested. And the result obtained in this case is more than satisfactory. The consistency result is 84% with a 97% coverage (much higher than the previous analysis). At a first glance, we may state that this measure should have priority over the one previously tested.
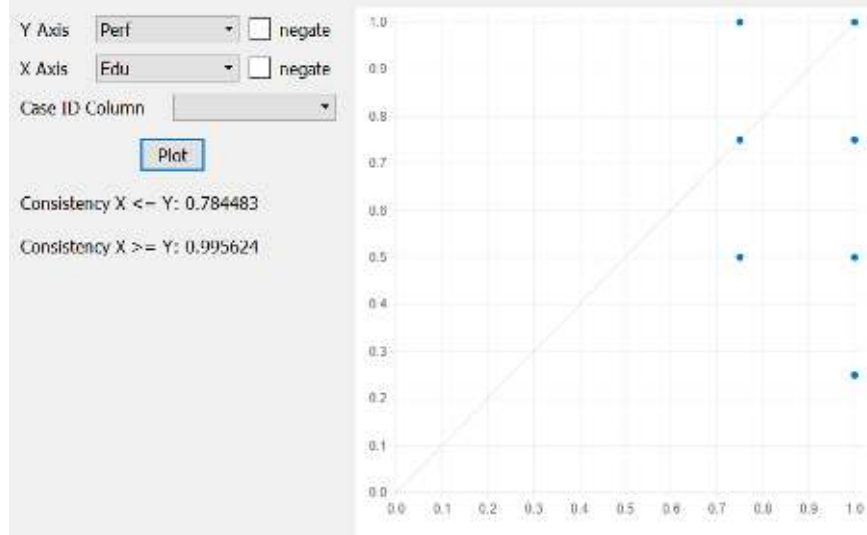
Figure no. 3. Causality distribution between variable Aut and the Perf result in the XY plan graph

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software

The influence of the previous Edu condition on the Perf output is illustrated in Figure 4. In this case, we notice that the consistency score is 0.78 and the coverage score is 0.99. We deduce that the coverage score is growing, the likelihood for the goal to be fulfilled being 78%, aspect supported by 99% of the respondents.

Figure no. 4. Causality distribution between variable Edu and the Perf result in the XY plan graph
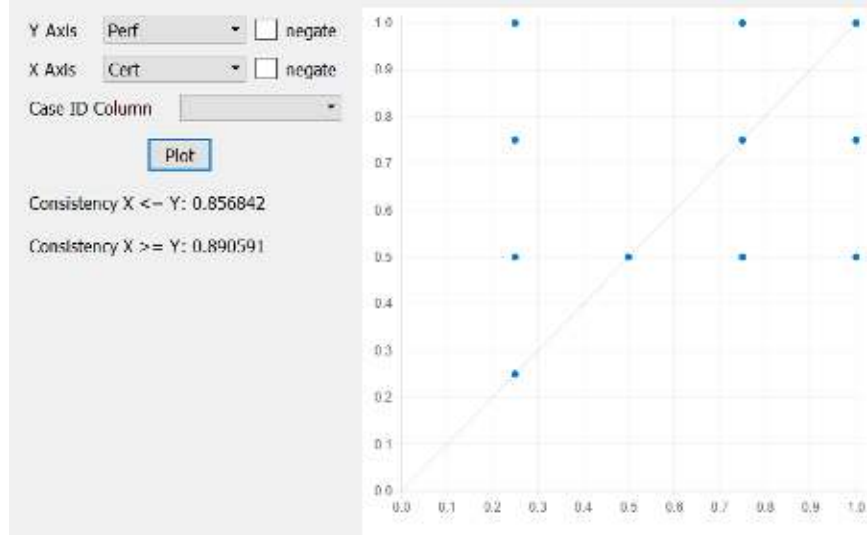

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software

In Figure 5 we decided to test the measure in which the Cert variable influences the fulfilment of Perf's goal.

In this case we notice that the success hypothesis further to the application of the measure has an 85% success chance, a score supported by 89% of the respondents. Further to the analysis, the 0.85 consistency score and 0.89 coverage score were obtained. In this case, the result is somewhat similar to the one obtained when testing the global influence of the factors.

Figure no. 5. Causality distribution between variable Cert and the Perf result in the XY plan graph
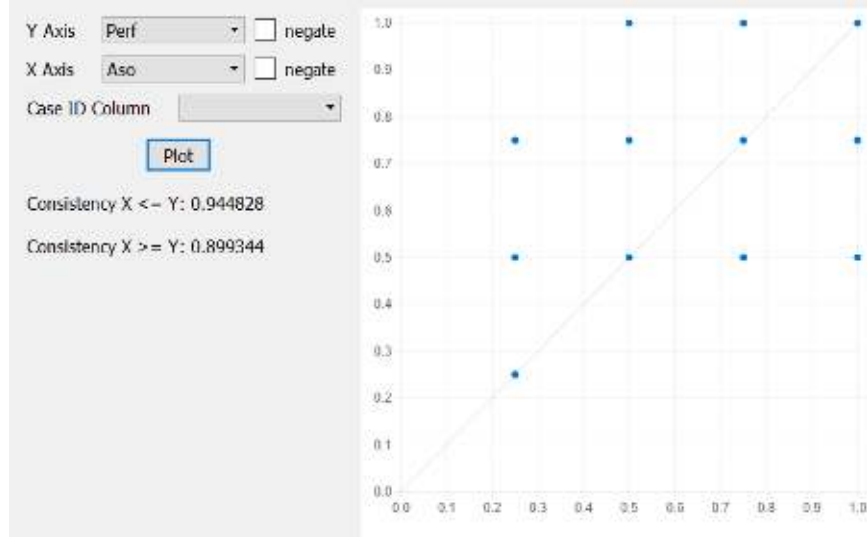

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software

In Figure 6 the measure in which the Aso causal factor influences the Perf result production is tested. In this case, it was noticed that the consistency score is more than satisfactory, i.e. 0.94, obtained under the conditions of a 0.89 coverage score. We may conclude that 89% of the

respondents agree with the fact that the result is 94% fulfilled if emphasis is placed on this measure when designing the strategy.

Figure no. 6. Causality distribution between variable Aso and the Perf result in the XY plan graph

Source: Figure resulting from the use of the XY plot function in the fsQCA software

5. Conclusions

Previously, we conducted similar studies on the foreign markets in order to be able to establish certain elements that might constitute orientation directions in regard to the design of a sustainable coaching and mentoring strategy in Romania. For the designed strategy to fulfil its goal, we decided that the survey conducted at national level be wider. As previously indicated, the questionnaire comprises several sections to be able to establish the strategy development priorities depending on the perception of each category participating in the coaching and mentoring processes. In order to concretely define the strategy, the future studies must also analyze the sections dedicated to the strategies' beneficiaries and designers.

We consider that the utilization of the QCA analysis method (Rihoux, 2009) of the collected data offers a safety degree on the survey results, this method completing the economic statistical instruments. (Aivaz, 2007)

We consider that at this level a conclusion may be drawn, which could offer some orientation direction. We decided to summarize the results in Table 3.

Table no. 3. Survey results' summary. cases

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Rez	0.98	0.75
Reg	0.89	0.88
Aut	0.84	0.97
Edu	0.78	0.99
Cert	0.85	0.89
Aso	0.94	0.89

Source: Table designed by the authors

We may notice that the obtained scores are favorable. This aspect is easy to anticipate because the variables' testing on the foreign markets also had a positive outcome. Domestically, given the crisis on the labor market, accentuated by the current pandemic elements, priorities must be established for the implementation result to be quick.

Based on the obtained data we may say that the priority should be on supporting the establishment of a profile organization, such as an association or foundation whose scope is to develop coaching and mentoring programs. We consider that the Aso variable returned the best score further to the testing. This measure is also easy to implement from a legal standpoint. (Guvernul României)

As an immediate measure, emphasis can be placed on certification. Certification offers some degree of safety to the beneficiary that the provider is highly qualified, who can thus meet the demands. Certification can be awarded either by international organizations that are present at a national level, which have the necessary expertise in this field but also by the associations and foundations proposed for establishment at the previous point. We notice that the Reg and Aut variables obtained a similar score to that of the Cert variable. We can state that this connection is valid from the logical viewpoint as a connection can be established between certification, regulation and the establishment of a body of experts. Nevertheless, we chose to consider certification as a priority factor due to the easy implementation, a certain infrastructure existing at the moment. The regulation process is legally laborious because of the state-level officialization process of a profession. Moreover, the establishment of a body of experts' institution involves more activities pertaining to the elaboration of standards and procedures, operating, control and financing regulations.

The last factor that must be emphasized is that of coaches' and mentors' development. We assume that variable Edu returned the poorest results further to testing because the quality training is a long-lasting process and so is the elaboration of training programs. Nevertheless, we consider education to be the factor underlying the professional training, but in view of the poorly developed infrastructure on the coaching and mentoring segment, other measures should be prioritized to obtained immediate results.

Considering that we have the data collected to elaborate the coaching and mentoring strategy at national level and that its complete processing in the near future is obvious, we set out to conduct a wide survey in a different context, in which to analyze the resources available for the successful implementation of the strategy. We consider that both financial and human resources are a key factor for the successful implementation of ay project.

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